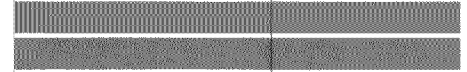


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15 November 2011

[REDACTED] **Iraq's Efforts To
Remain Outside Iran's Orbit
Post-US Withdrawal** [REDACTED]

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Iraq's Efforts To Remain Outside Iran's Orbit Post-US Withdrawal

15 November 2011

Iraq in the wake of the US withdrawal is unlikely to significantly move toward Iran's orbit in the near term because of their disagreement on core bilateral issues, such as borders and support for militants, and suspicion among Iraqi elites and the public about Iran's role in Iraq.

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Iraq's Shia-led government will probably work to avoid entanglement in regional power struggles between Arab states and Iran or the perception it is doing Washington's bidding.

- Iraq's Shia leaders are pursuing cordial relations with Tehran and downplaying bilateral disputes to maintain Iranian political and financial support they judge essential to consolidating a Shia-led state.

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- We judge that Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has an Arab nationalist view of Iraq's regional role.

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Baghdad Split on Iranian Threat ...

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Maliki is probably confident that close diplomatic relations with Washington and a security partnership reflective of other US missions in the region will be sufficient to help check Iranian influence after the US military departs in 2011.

- Maliki probably hopes that renewed emphasis on the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA), purchases of advanced US weapon systems, including F-16s, and a US training mission will counteract the view that Iraq is vulnerable to Iran's political meddling.

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Iraqi Kurds, Sunnis, and other rivals of Maliki worry that the US withdrawal will give Iran an opportunity for greater involvement in mediating internal Iraqi disputes. Leaders from the predominantly Sunni Iraqi National Movement (INM) have long complained of Tehran's role in

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Iraq

diplomatic outreach to other regional states and Asia. We assess that, at least in the near term, he will continue working to disabuse internal and regional critics from the view that Iraq is becoming a dependable ally for Iran.

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- Disagreements between Baghdad and Tehran are most likely to arise

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This concern about Iranian aims for hegemony over Baghdad reinforces the sectarian tenor of Iraqi politics and offers Iran leverage by forcing Maliki to rely more on parties closer to Tehran. When Sunni and Kurdish parties are more reluctant to partner with Maliki, he relies on the anti-US Sadrists for political support.

- We judge Maliki's nationalist approach to foreign policy reinforces his suspicions of Iran's sometimes heavyhanded interference.

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- Iraqi Shia will probably continue to seek Tehran's financial help as long as they judge Iranian money is needed to win elections, retain control of government, and counter the financing Sunni parties receive from Arab states.

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- Iran's unpopularity suggests that Iraqi parties preparing for elections in 2013 and 2014 will try again to publicly distance themselves from Tehran. More than half of Iraqis—and 47 percent of Iraqi Shia—have an unfavorable view of Iran,

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... But Likely To Keep Distance From Iran

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Since Maliki was selected prime minister in 2006, he has avoided concessions to Iran on territorial and security disputes and is diversifying Iraq's ties away from Iran with expanded trade and

Instead, Baghdad in the next two years will probably seek to avoid involvement in regional power struggles and "zero-sum" situations in which it must choose between Washington and

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Iran. Maliki in March 2011 told [redacted] that Iraq seeks to occupy a middle ground in the Arab-Iranian regional rivalry.²⁰

- Baghdad has worried that the United States—or Israel—would use Iraqi territory to attack Iran.²¹

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[redacted]

- Maliki has been willing to press Iran in private on behalf of the United States, such as he did in mid-2011 about Iran's backing of militant attacks.

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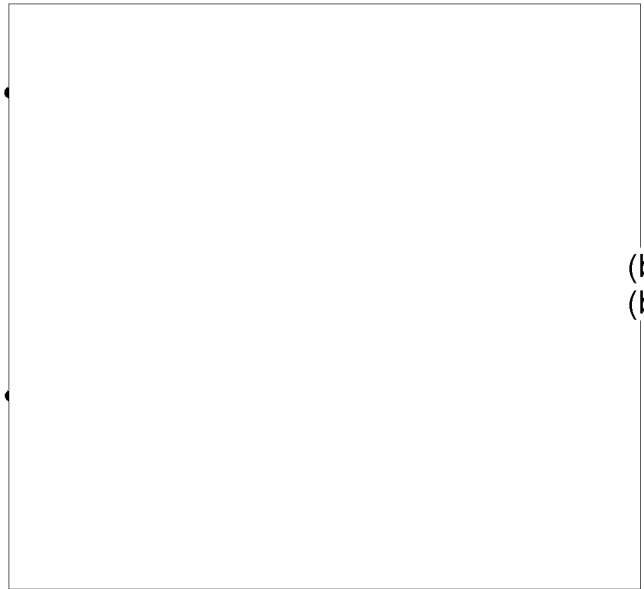
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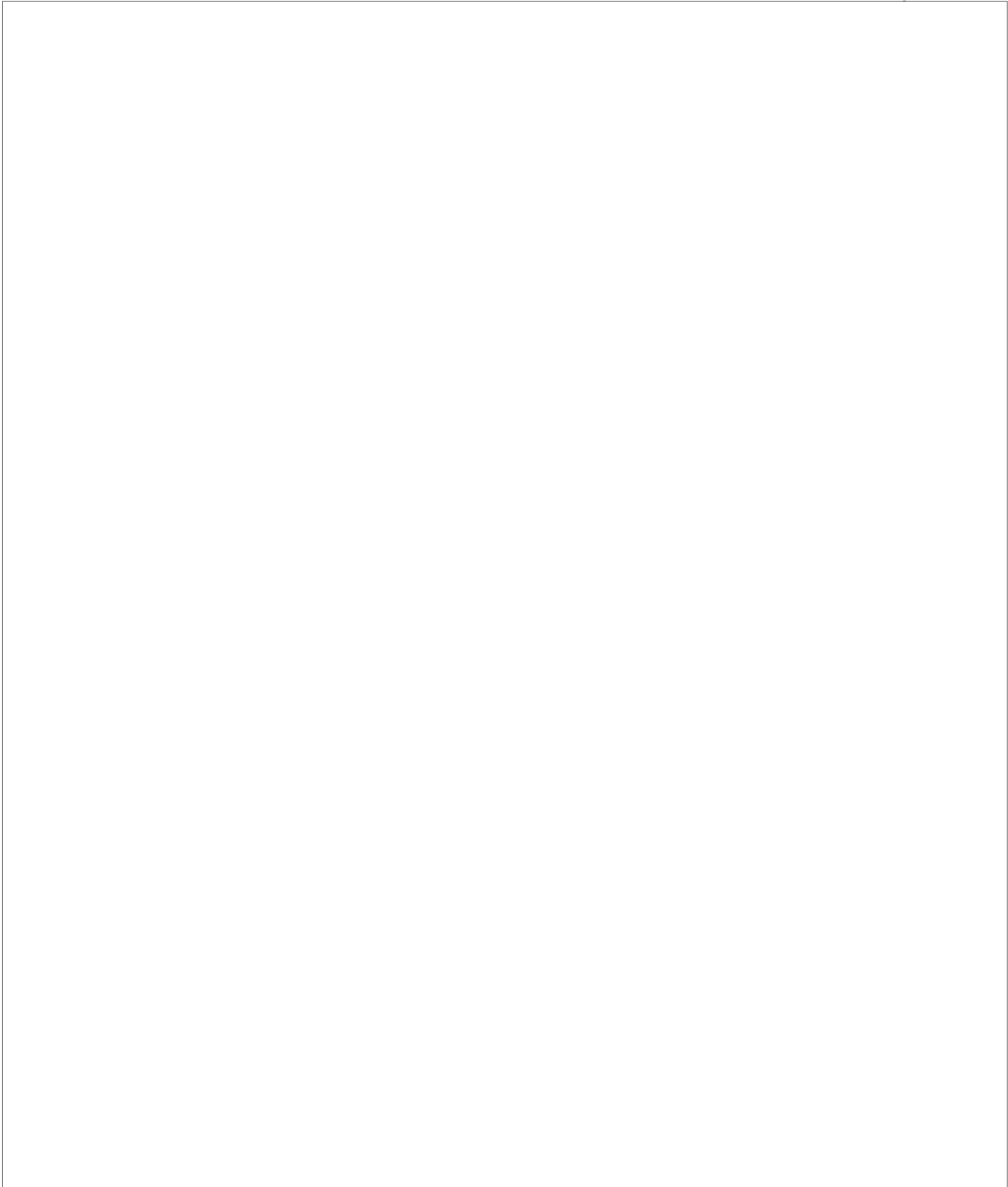
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